

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

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EXDIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT PARIS 22441 ACTION SECSTATE INFO NOUAKCHOTT,
ALGIERS, LONDON, RABAT, AND MADRID DATED JULY 17, 1978.

QUOTE: S E C R E T PARIS 22441

EXDIS

LONDON FOR SAUNDERS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PEPR, FR, SS

SUBJ: SAHARAN PEACE PROSPECTS

REF: STATE 178749

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1. POL COUNSELOR AND EMBASSY OFFICER DISCUSSED LATEST
DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHWEST AFRICA WITH QUAI DIRECTOR
FOR NORTH AFRICAN AND MIDDLE EAST AFFAIRS LECOMPT
JULY 17. AFTER HEARING OUR PRESENTATION BASED ON
REFTEL, LECOMPT SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THAT FOR THE
TIME BEING THE US WAS BETTER PLACED THAN FRANCE TO

ACT AS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN THE PARTIES OR TO TAKE OTHER ACTION DESIGNED TO PUSH A PEACE SETTLEMENT. FOR THE MOMENT THE FRENCH POSITION IS TO FOLLOW EVENTS IN THE AREA WITH CLOSE INTEREST, BUT TO TAKE NO PARTICULAR ACTION.

2. LECOMPT SAID THAT THIS FRENCH POSTURE RESULTS FROM THE NATURE OF FRANCE'S RELATIONS WITH ALL THE COUNTRIES OF THE AREA AND THE NEED TO OBSERVE AS SCRUPULOUS A POSTURE OF "NEUTRALITY" AS POSSIBLE GIVEN THE FACT OF FRANCE'S ACTIVE COMMITMENT TO PROTECT ITS CITIZENS IN MAURITANIA. THE NEW LEADERS OF MAURITANIA ARE WELL AND FAVORABLY KNOWN TO THE GOF AND CLOSE RELATIONS WITH THE GIRM ARE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE. THE GOF FAVORS A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT AND HAS STATED THIS PUBLICLY. GIVEN THE EVIDENT DESIRE OF THE NEW MAURITANIAN LEADERSHIP FOR PEACE, SOME KIND OF NEGOTIATIONS COULD SOON GET UNDER WAY. AFTER THIS PROCESS HAS BEGUN, FRANCE MIGHT BE ABLE TO PLAY A ROLE IN MOV MOVING THINGS ALONG. FRANCE'S HIGH PROFILE IN THE REGION PROHIBITS EVEN THE ROLE OF MESSENGER AT THIS TIME. SECRECY WOULD BE DIFFICULT AND WHEN THE FRENCH ROLE BECOMES PUBLIC THE FOCUS WOULD BE ON FRANCE WHICH WOULD DETRACT FROM THE EFFORTS OF THE PARTIES THEMSELVES TO WORK OUT A SOLUTION. THE NATURE OF THE US PRESENCE IN THE AREA AND ITS RELATIONS WITH MOROCCO NEED NOT
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PRECLUDE THE US FROM PLAYING A MORE ACTIVE ROLE AT THIS TIME, HOWEVER, LECOMPT ADDED.

3. ON THE SPECIFIC POINT OF HOW THE MOROCCANS MIGHT REACT TO MAURITANIAN WILLINGNESS TO SURRENDER THE SOUTHERN THIRD OF THE EX-SPANISH SAHARA AS PART OF A PEACE SETTLEMENT, LECOMPT SAID THAT THE REACTION MIGHT WELL BE STRONGLY NEGATIVE. THERE WOULD AT A MINIMUM CERTAINLY BE CONSIDERABLE SUSPICION OF MAURITANIAN INTENTIONS. THE GIRM WOULD HAVE TO MOVE CAREFULLY IN ITS DISCUSSIONS WITH THE MOROCCANS ON THIS POINT.

4. LECOMPT SEEMED CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE

POSSIBILITY OF SOME IMPROVEMENT IN FRENCH-ALGERIAN RELATIONS. REFERRING TO ALGERIAN FONMIN BOUTEFLIKA'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT GISCARD LAST WEEK, HE SAID THAT THE FRENCH POSITION WAS THAT FRENCH-ALGERIAN TENSIONS OVER THE SAHARA CAN BE GREATLY DIMINISHED IF THERE IS: (A) REDUCED PRESSURE FROM ALGERIA ON MAURITANIA; AND (B) NO THREAT TO FRENCH CITIZENS IN MAURITANIA. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THE ISSUE OF THE JAGUARS AND

FRENCH INTERVENTION MIGHT JUST FADE AWAY; IF THERE IS NO THREAT, THE JAGUARS WOULD JUST SIT HARMLESSLY IN DAKA. HE IMPLIED THAT THE GISCARD-BOUDEFLLIKA MEETING ENDED WITH THE AGREEMENT THAT THE TWO SIDES WOULD SEE HOW EVENTS DEVELOP OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS AND THEN HAVE ANOTHER MEETING TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS.

5. LECOMPT CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT ONCE A MOMENTUM FOR PEACE IS ESTABLISHED THE OUTLINE OF AN AGREEMENT SHOULD NOT BE IMPOSSIBLE. (HE DID NOT FURTHER ELABORATE.) FRANCE WOULD BE FOLLOWING EVENTS CAREFULLY AND ACT WHEN IT BELIEVED THIS WOULD BE HELPFUL. IN THE MEANTIME, THE SITUATION WOULD HAVE TO MATURE FURTHER. FOR THE MOMENT IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE TO
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COORDINATE ACTION WITH THE US IN THE AREA. LECOMPT SAID THAT CONTINUED CLOSE CONSULTATION WITH THE US WAS DESIRABLE AND THAT HE IS VERY MUCH LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUDERS ON MONDAY, JULY 24.
HARTMAN UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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